

Madelaine Inglis (right) dealt with the stressful and emotional decision to help her mother Barbara find a place in an aged care facility after she had suffered a series of falls at home.



Moving Mum into a *nursing* home

Putting a parent into an aged care facility can be a painful, traumatic process but a necessary one, as Madelaine Inglis found out. She outlines the best way to go about it.

Mum had a fall. Apparently it often starts with a fall. But this time, Mum was home, she was alone and she couldn't get up.

The good thing was she pressed her personal alarm and an ambulance was dispatched immediately to her home in Sydney. The bad thing was her daughter – her only child and her primary carer – was in Melbourne with work.

Aunty Jan phoned me to tell me not to worry but Mum had had a fall. She was on her way to hospital by ambulance and Aunty Jan was on her way to meet Mum there. I was beside myself. All I could think of was Mum, frightened and alone. She'd never been in an ambulance and had rarely been in hospital. I made a mad dash to Melbourne airport and got the first plane back to Sydney, then I made my way to the hospital.

The doctor confirmed Mum was okay and that she hadn't hurt herself, but as this was her third fall in as many months they needed to run a series of tests to determine why she kept falling.

Mum was 85, divorced, had lived independently for 24 years and she liked it that way. I lived on the other side of Sydney with then 7-year-old twin boys and a husband who did full-time shift work. I also worked full-time as a partner in a law firm.

Mum had to stop her various medications, under hospital supervision, to determine which medication or combination of medications was causing her to fall. It was a lengthy process and as it soon became apparent to everyone, including Mum, that it was unlikely she would be able to return home, she became difficult.

Mum's unit was on the first floor of a three storey block of units which required her to climb a total of 22 steps into her unit. Given how



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unsteady she was, it was not a matter of if she would fall, it was a matter of when. I was a nervous wreck at the thought of her returning home.

During her hospital stay, the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) formally assessed Mum. Given her age, her health and our combined circumstances, ACAT determined she required low-level care in an aged care facility. She would need to go straight from hospital into a facility. Mum was not going home. Ever.

Imagine living independently for 24 years, coming and going as you please, then having a couple of falls, being taken to hospital and told you were not going home. Mum wasn't just upset. She was angry, very angry, and she blamed me.

Next I had to find a suitable aged care facility close to me that would take her on a respite care basis initially, but with a view to a permanent placement. And I needed to find that facility fast.

I took leave from work and, with the help of my friend Margaret, started inspecting facilities. Most were unpleasant and had “that smell”. I would come away despondent and depressed. Finally I found a clean,

comfortable, convenient facility with a bright cheerful room looking onto a common garden and the staff were caring, wonderful people. Now I just had to convince Mum.

With the support of Aunty Jan, I took Mum to meet the staff and view the facility. Mum hated it and had no hesitation expressing her displeasure in her loudest voice to everyone she met as we toured the facility. Yet the facility ticked all the boxes and I very quickly realised Mum wouldn't have been happy no matter where I took her. She just wanted to go home.

The next day she was discharged from hospital and I moved her into the facility. I took her personal belongings and tried to make it as comfortable as possible. I bought her a television and had it installed. I also stocked up a small fridge, even including a bottle of wine for cocktail hour. As I left, she stood in the doorway of her room and screamed at me, “You're not leaving me here”. I left shaking and cried all the way home, desperate for confirmation I had done the right thing.

It didn't stop there. Fortunately, I had already arranged for Mum ►

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAROL HANCOCK. GETTY IMAGES.



Barbara now lives 10 minutes away from her daughter, and regularly enjoys “sleepovers” with her grandsons, eight-year-old twins Alexander (left) and Philip.

to appoint me as her attorney and Enduring Guardian. As her attorney, I was able to sign her respite care agreement on her behalf. I was then able to ultimately sign her permanent residency contract.

I had to go to Mum’s banks and arrange to become a signatory on her accounts so I could access her money and pay her bills. I had to advise Centrelink, Medicare and her private health fund of her new arrangements and appoint myself as her nominee. I had to redirect her mail and cancel various services. Finally, with the help of my dear friends Rose and Sallyanne and Auntie Jan, I had to clear out Mum’s unit, renovate it and sell it to fund the accommodation bond for the facility.

This was an extremely difficult, emotional and stressful time for both my mother and myself. It is one thing for me professionally as a lawyer to advise my clients to ensure they have their affairs in order, but my personal experience with my mother certainly drove home to me the importance of practising what we preach in the most confronting way possible.

Now, nearly 18 months later, Mum is well and truly settled into her new home. She’s happy and healthy. She has round the clock care. She has a new routine, new friends, constant visitors and a calm acceptance of this new stage in her life. She lives only 10 minutes away and has regular “sleepovers” with her two adoring grandsons. We are able to spend more time with her than ever before. As for me, I finally have the confirmation, and most importantly the peace of mind, I did do the right thing, for everyone. ■

TIPS FOR PREPARING PARENTS FOR THE TRANSITION INTO *aged care*

APPOINT AN ATTORNEY

An attorney can assist managing assets, as well as financial and legal affairs if assistance is required (for example, access bank accounts and pay bills, sell assets to pay fees for aged care services or facilities).

- insurances
- superannuation
- pensions
- medications, medical conditions and allergies
- local GP and any other treating medical practitioners or specialists

APPOINT AN ENDURING GUARDIAN

An enduring guardian can assist with making personal health and lifestyle decisions if assistance is required (for example, where parents live and what medical and dental treatment they are to receive).

LOCATE AND SECURE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

Ensure you know where important original documents – such as wills, power of attorney, appointment of enduring guardian, title deed to the family home and any other real estate, insurance policies, superannuation documents – are kept, and ensure they are safe.

MAINTAIN KEY PERSONAL DETAILS

Ensure you keep an up-to-date list of details for:

- bank accounts
- credit cards
- Medicare
- private health fund
- Centrelink

LEGAL ADVICE

Obtain independent legal advice before signing agreements or contracts regarding entry into an aged care facility to ensure you understand the entitlements, obligations and fees.

FINANCIAL ADVICE

Obtain independent financial advice regarding the best available option to fund aged care costs (such as whether to sell or lease the family home) and to understand what the impact will be on assets, superannuation and entitlements.

DON'T WAIT!

Be proactive in ensuring your parents’ affairs are in order. Encourage them to take charge of their affairs sooner rather than later. Delay will only cause unnecessary stress when circumstances create an urgent need to move quickly. The appointment of an attorney or an enduring guardian can only be made when you have mental capacity to do so. The more organised you are, the less stressful the transition will be.



THINKING ABOUT MOVING A PARENT INTO AGED CARE?

You can find out more about nursing homes or support services in your area by going to myagedcare.gov.au/service-finders.

Caring for a parent can be demanding. To access respite services, call Carer Support respite and information service on 1800 052 222.

To arrange a free assessment of your parent’s needs before transitioning into the aged care system, go to myagedcare.gov.au/acat-assessments.

Can’t afford the fees? You can find out more about getting a reduction or waiver at myagedcare.gov.au (follow the links to financial, aged care home – costs explained).

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